

ASSOCIATION OF
BOXING COMMISSION
BARE KNUCKLE
FIGHTING UNIFIED
RULES

August 02, 2023

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Introduction

The Association of Boxing Commission (ABC) has developed a standard of unified rules for Bare-Knuckle Fighting. As documented in this document, the Unified Rules establishes the recommended guide for Commissions to use when Bare Knuckle Fighting occurs in your jurisdiction.

Bare Knuckle-Fighting is not new; however, it has become mainstream in the United States over the past five years. The rules established under the Association of Boxing Commissions (ABC) will not override Commissions State Statutory Regulations. Use the established unified rules as documented as closely as possible to maintain consistency in regulating the sport throughout the United States.

Association of Boxing Commission Bare Knuckle Fighting Committee Members

1. Committee Members (Identified by Name)

a. Voting members for rules.

Timothy Shipman (Chairman, FL)

Nick Meeker (WY)

Kerry Hatley (TX)

Dr. Louis Durkin (MA)

Dr. Don Muzzi (FL)

Brian Dunn (Vice Chairman: NE)

Scott Burt (Bare Knuckle Boxing Hall of Fame)

Ezra Sam (MN)

Christopher Young (FL)

b. None voting members

Committee Participant: Three members from each Promotion Group (BKFC and BYB).

i. Chris Lytle (BKFC); Tom Sconzo (BKFC); Sean Wheelock

ii. Mike Vazquez (BYB); Greg Bloom (BYB); Mel Valenzuela

c. Technical Knowledge Expert:

i. Bobby Wombacher

ii. Andrew Glenn

iii. Sean Wheelock

iv. Mel Valenzuela

v. Bruce Baird

d. Guest Technical Advisor:

Erin Toughill (Women Attire)

Rules and Regulations of Bare-Knuckle Fighting

Duration of Rounds

Bare-Knuckle Fighting Bouts **shall not** extend past a total of six rounds and a total of Eighteen **18** Minutes of fighting with one (1) minute rest period between rounds. The one-minute rest period does not count as part of the 18 minutes of fighting.

Promoters are authorized to mix bout cards and schedule bouts for two or three-minute rounds. Regulatory Commissions shall consider the following information when approving bouts:

- Fighter Record
- Combative Sports Experience
- Skill level
- Physical Condition

Rounds are approved for two (2) or three (3) minutes: Example Max Time Allowed.

Rounds	1	2	3	4	5	6	Max
Minutes	3:00	3:00	3:00	3:00	3:00	3:00	18:00
Minutes	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00	2:00	12:00
				Pro Debut	Standard	Title	

Professional Debut Participants **shall not** enter a Bare-Knuckle Fighting Contest without prior combative sports experience as established by regulatory commissions.

- Professional debut participants shall be restricted to four (4) two (2) minute rounds.
 - A Professional Debut Participant is defined as a participant that has not participated in a professional combative sports contest and may have experience in Amateur Boxing or Mixed Martial Arts. Regulatory Commission should follow their statutory regulation of allowing a participant to turn professional.
 - Professional Participants with previous experience in Boxing, Mixed Martial Arts, or other Combative Sports **are not** considered Professional Debut Participants and can participate in any number of rounds without restriction as approved by the Regulatory Commission.
- Female participants shall be restricted to participate in two (2) minute rounds.

Amateur Fighters are prohibited from participating in Bare-Knuckle Fighting Events.

Referee (Sole Arbiter)

The Referee is the sole Arbiter of the assigned bout. As the sole Arbiter of the bout, the Referee is the only individual allowed to stop the contest. In the event of a severe injury or cut to a participant, the Referee will seek medical advice from the Ringside Physician to determine if the fighter should be allowed to continue with the bout.

The Referee is the only individual authorized to:

- Interpret rules and situations inside the ring
- Determine if a blow was legal or a foul and if the foul was intentional or accidental
- Declare that an unintentional injury has occurred and what round
- Determine whether there has been a knockdown.

No Referee or promoter has the authority to override a Ringside Physicians' authority to Stop a Fight.

Before the Bell to Start

The Referee shall immediately ensure each fighter has removed any unnecessary clothing, such as a warm-up suit, robe, and body piercings, including tongue piercings, before receiving the Referee's final instructions. A bout shall not start or continue unless the Ringside Physician(s) is at the ring/cage side, and the Ringside Physician(s) shall not leave until the fight has concluded.

Knockdown

A knockdown occurs when any part of a fighter's body touches the mat other than the sole of their feet following a legal strike or is defenselessly hanging on/over the ropes or back of the cage, preventing the body from falling to the mat. The Referee is the only individual to determine if a knockdown occurs versus a slip. If fighters go to the ground from anything other than a knockdown, the fight will be restarted with both fighters standing. There is no three (3) knockdown rule unless approved by the Commission.

Count

There is **No Standing Eight (8) Count**. When a participant is knocked down from a legal strike, the Referee will order the opponent to the furthest neutral ring designation and will pick up the count from the Timekeeper or Knockdown Referee. The Referee will announce the count verbally and with a motion to the downed Participant at each second of the count.

If the fighter leaves the neutral ring designation, the Referee will stop the count and direct the fighter to return to the neutral ring designation area; once the Participant returns to the designated ring location, the Referee will pick up the count from where he stopped the count. If the Participant rises at the count of eight (8), the Referee will evaluate if the fighter is ready to continue and start the bout. If the fighter remains down and the Referee reaches the count of ten (10), the contestant will be Knocked Out (KO).

Fouls

Fouls can be intentional or unintentional. A fighter hit with an accidental low blow must continue after a reasonable amount of time but no more than five (5) minutes, or they will lose the fight. A fighter may be disqualified from the occurrence of a flagrant foul, which is the discretion of the Referee of the bout as sole Arbiter. Fouls may result in points deducted from the fighter who committed the fouls and or disqualification. The points deduction number may vary depending on the severity of the foul. The Referee must clearly indicate to the judges that a foul has occurred and the number of points to be deducted from the fighter. Judges cannot assume a foul has occurred and deduct points from the fighter.

The Referee has the authority to disqualify a fighter for attempting to commit a foul without warning.

Instant Replay

Instant replay shall be used if the Promotion and Commission have agreed prior to the event and the promoter provides all necessary instant replay equipment. The use of instant replay shall be limited to the following criteria:

- Only the Referee may determine if the use of instant replay is appropriate.
- The Referee shall only use instant replay for the purposes of determining if a foul was committed that caused a "bout ending sequence" that brought about the final end of the fight.
- Based on the instant replay review, the Referee may make the final call with respect to the bout that could result in one of the following decisions: a winner of the bout, a "no contest" determination, a disqualification, or a technical decision.

Judges

All bouts will be evaluated and scored by three (3) judges. The bouts will be scored using the ten (10) point must system to determine the winner. The scorecards shall be collected from each judge between each round of the bout.

Scoring Criteria

Judges shall evaluate the bout based on effective striking (Priority #1), effective aggressiveness (Priority #2), and control of the fighting area (Priority #3). Effective aggressiveness and control of the fighting area are only taken into consideration if effective striking is weighed as being even. Effective striking is judged by determining the impact/effect of legal strikes landed by a fighter solely based on the results of such legal strikes. Effective aggressiveness means aggressively making attempts to finish the fight. Fighting area control is assessed by determining who is dictating the bout's pace, place, and position.

Round Scores

10-9 Round – Fighter routinely won the round by a close or moderate margin

10-8 Round – Fighter won the round by a highly decisive margin (without a knockdown)

10-8 Round – Fighter won the round and scores one knockdown

10-7 Round – Fighter won the round and scores two knockdowns

10-6 Round – Fighter won the round and scores three knockdowns

10-10 Round – This is very rare and is not a score to be used as an excuse by a judge that cannot assess the differences in the round. It shall only be used to score an incomplete round where nothing occurred in the fight.

Decisions

The bell **will not** save a fighter in any round. Suppose a participant is down when the duration of the round has expired. In that case, the timekeeper shall not ring the bell, and the Referee shall continue the count until the Participant rises or is counted out. If the Referee determines that the Participant is on his feet and fit to continue before he reaches the ten (10) count, he will indicate to the timekeeper to ring the bell, and the round will then terminate.

Anytime a participant loses control of bodily functions and **Urinate, Defecates, or Regurgitates**, the Referee will stop the fight, and the fighter will lose by TKO.

The Participants may win or lose a contest by the following decisions:

- Technical Knockout
- Knockout
- Disqualification
- Draw
- No Contest: A “No Contest” Decision shall be rendered for bouts that have not completed **half of the scheduled rounds plus one second (SR:1/2+1 sec)** when stopped by the Referee in their sole discretion, including for an accidental foul causing an injury that does not allow the injured Participant to continue.
- The regulating organization will advise the officiating Referee of other instances in which the bout will be stopped, where incidents occur that are not in the control of an official or Participant.
- Technical Decision: If the Referee, in their sole discretion, determines that **after half of the scheduled rounds plus one second (SR:1/2+1 sec)**, the bout has to be stopped due to an accidental clash of heads, eye poke, low blow, or any other unintentional foul that causes an injury severe enough that renders the combatant unfit to continue then the fight will go to the judges to score, including the partial round when the bout was halted. The result shall be declared a "Technical Decision" The judges will not score an additional round if the fight is stopped during the one (1) minute rest period.

If the Referee, in their sole discretion, determines that an intentional foul causes an injury and the bout is allowed to continue, and the injury results in the **bout being stopped** after **half of the scheduled rounds plus one second (SR:1/2+1 sec)**, the injured combatant will win by **Technical Decision**. If the Participant is ahead on the scorecards, the bout will result in a **Technical Draw** if the injured combatant is behind or even on the scorecards.

The Referee, in their sole discretion, determines that an intentional foul causes an injury, and the bout is **NOT** allowed to continue. The Referee may disqualify the Participant who initiated the intentional foul.

If the Participant injures themselves while attempting to foul their opponent intentionally, the Referee will not take any action in their favor, and this injury shall be the same as one produced by a fair blow. If the Referee feels that a participant has conducted himself in an unsportsmanlike manner, they may stop the bout and disqualify the Participant.

Partial or incomplete rounds will be scored.

Legal Techniques

The only legal technique allowed in Bare Knuckle Fighting is Bare Knuckle Hand Strikes with a clenched fist, which is a punch thrown with bare fists between opponents. Standard face-to-face punches are legal from the waist to the top of the head, including fighting in the clinch. Participants in the clinch may hold their opponent by the back of the neck in a downward position and punch to any legal strike zone of the opponent, with the exception of punches to the back of the head.

Illegal Techniques, Strikes, and Punches

Illegal techniques, strikes, and punches in Bare Knuckle Fighting are as follows but not limited to:

1. Hitting the opponent below the belt;
2. Hitting an opponent who is down or is getting up after being down;
3. Deliberately maintaining a clinch without other action;
4. Wrestling or kicking the opponent;
5. Putting a finger into any orifice of the opponent or into any cut or laceration on an opponent, including fish hooking;
6. Pulling the opponent's hair;
7. Manipulating the opponent's fingers
8. Striking an opponent who is helpless as the result of blows but is supported by the ropes and does not fall
9. Butting the opponent with the head, shoulder, knee, or elbow
10. Hitting the opponent with the elbow or forearm
11. Striking the opponent's body over the kidneys
12. Hitting the opponent on the back of the head or neck
13. Gouging the opponent's eye in any manner
14. Hitting during a break, which is signaled by the Referee's command or physical act to separate the fighters
15. Hitting the opponent after the bell has sounded, ending the round
16. Using the ropes or cage to gain an advantage over the opponent
17. Pushing the opponent around the fighting area or into the ropes/cage
18. Timidity, excessive clenching, including intentionally spitting out the mouthpiece, running from an opponent, or other similar behavior.
19. Biting the opponent
20. Headlocks
21. Throat punches or strikes directly toward the throat of an opponent
22. Fingers outstretched toward an opponent's face or eyes
23. No throws or takedowns
24. Engaging in any other action not described in this subsection that is deemed an intentional foul by the Referee on the basis that the action poses a danger to the safety of either fighter, impedes fair and competitive play, or is unsportsmanlike.
25. Spinning back fists
26. Hammer-fists

Weight Classes

Weight classes shall be approved by Regulatory Commission.

Weight Division / Class	Pounds
Straw-Weight	100-107 lbs.
Fly -Weight	108-115 lbs.
Bantam- Weight	116 - 125lbs
Feather-Weight	126 -135 lbs.
Light- Weight	136-145 lbs.
Welter-Weight	146 -155 lbs.
Middle- Weight	156 -165 lbs.
Super Middle-Weight	166 - 175 lbs.
Light Heavy-Weight	176 - 185 lbs.
Middle Heavy- Weight	186 - 205 lbs.
Cruiser-Weight	206 - 225 lbs.
Heavy-Weight	226 - 265 lbs.
Super Heavy-Weight	266- ^ No Limit

Approved Attire/Appearance

All competitors must wear such protective gear as deemed necessary by the Commission. Male contestants shall not wear any form of clothing on their upper body. Male and female competitors shall wear the appropriate shorts, shoes (boxing or wrestling shoes), and mouthpiece. Male competitors shall also wear the appropriate groin protection. Female participants shall wear attire to prevent the showing of cleavage as much as possible and are approved to wear a short-sleeved (above the elbow) or sleeveless form-fitting rash guard and/or sports bra(s). **No loose-fitting tops and/or breast protectors shall be allowed.** Female competitors will follow the exact requirements for bottom covering as the male competitors, minus the requirement for groin protection. When deemed necessary by the Referee, all competitors shall have their hair secured in a manner that does not interfere with the vision and safety of either contestant. No object can be worn to secure the contestant's hair, which may cause injury to either contestant. Inspectors shall ensure that the fingernails are clipped at a length so as not to cause injury to the opponent. **The wearing of jewelry is strictly prohibited during all contests.**

Hand Wraps

Hand wraps shall include the wrist and are restricted to twelve (12) yards of soft gauze bandage per hand and not more than two (2) inches in width, held in place by not more than ten (10) yards of surgical tape, no more than one (1) inch (25.4 mm) width. The surgical tape shall not be applied within one (1) inch of the knuckles.

- No tape or gauze will extend past the fighter's knuckle when a clenched fist is made.
- No tape or gauze is allowed between or on the fighter's fingers (*with the exception of the thumb, as follows*).
 - *The thumb of a fighter may include a single wrap of tape when the wrist is being wrapped.*
- Wrapping of the wrist shall not extend more than three (3) inches past the wrist juncture.

Mouthpiece

All fighters are required to wear a mouthpiece during competition. The round cannot begin without the mouthpiece. If the mouthpiece is dislodged during competition, the Referee will call "time" when there is a **lull** in the bout and have the mouthpiece replaced at the first opportune moment without interfering with the immediate action. The Referee may deduct points if they

feel the mouthpiece is being purposefully spit out.

Joint/Body Coverings

Other than the competitor's hands (as previously listed), there will be no taping, covering, or protective gear of any kind on the upper body. This includes but is not limited to joint sleeves, padding, any form of a brace, or body gauze/tape. A competitor may use soft neoprene-type sleeves to cover only the knee(s) or elbow(s). Approved sleeves may not have: padding, Velcro, plastic, metal, ties, or any other material considered unsafe or that may create an unfair advantage. Sanctioning Commissions may impose stricter rules to comply with local Statutes.

Petroleum Jelly

Fighters shall not be permitted to have excessive petroleum jelly or another similar substance on any part of their body, as determined by the sole discretion of the Referee. Petroleum jelly or another similar substance shall be applied to the face prior to the bout by an approved cut-man or licensed cornerman. The reapplication of petroleum jelly or another similar substance to the face may be allowed between rounds and shall only be applied by an approved cut-man or licensed cornerman. (As approved by the Commission or regulatory body).

Fighting Area

A Commission-approved ring or cage that promotes contestant, official, and spectator safety will be used by promoters. All cages/rings must be inspected and pre-approved by the Commission before an event.

Prohibited Substances

All fighters are prohibited from using any drugs, alcohol, or stimulants that could either impair or enhance their fight performance pursuant to the rules of the sanctioning Commission. The consumption of any substance other than plain water or Commission-approved sports drinks is prohibited during the event. The regulating Commission has final authority to decide prohibited substances under their jurisdiction.

Commission Considerations

Event results shall be uploaded to Boxrec and Combat Registry. All medical **injuries** and administrative suspensions shall be **included in the upload of bout results**.

Participant Federal Identification Cards for Participants participating in Bare-Knuckle Events will be issued via BoxRec or as directed by the Association of Boxing Commissions.

***To the best of its ability, the Commission should allow for the facilitation of reliable and timely on-site laceration repair.**

Bouts between professionals and amateurs are prohibited. Once a fighter is considered a professional fighter in one combat sport, they shall only compete as a professional fighter in all other combat sports.

Any fighter who engages in a bout that a Commission does not sanction will be subject to suspension for a minimum of thirty (30) days from the date of the fighter's last non-sanctioned bout. Prior to competing in a bout after the non-sanctioned bout, the fighter is responsible for obtaining a written clearance from a Physician and having new bloodwork drawn after the date of the unsanctioned bout. Any Sanctioning Commission may impose stricter punishments.